

# Marketing & Regulatory Programs

# HR BROADCAST

August 2011 Issue

## Situational Frontline Leadership Program

By Kim Kanaga ([Kim.R.Kanaga@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:Kim.R.Kanaga@aphis.usda.gov), 301-734-5600)

During FY 2011, the Experienced Supervisory Training offered to the Agency leaders in APHIS provided the opportunity to participate in the Situational Frontline Leadership Program. This training offering was one of many vehicles used to support our Cultural Transformation, which essentially charges our leaders with creating an inclusive environment where differences are not just valued but leveraged and where all employees are fully committed, motivated and engaged in achieving the mission of USDA. In other words, our leaders have been challenged with not just getting the work done but bringing out the best in all of us. To achieve this, leaders are being asked to acknowledge that “one size does not fit all” and consequently they will need to adapt their leadership styles to fit the situation and meet the particular needs of each of their employees.

If that sounds familiar that is because it is exactly what our supervisors and managers are being trained to do in the Situational Frontline Leadership Program – it provides the tools and skills to do just that. The underlying principles of the Situational Leadership approach are really quite simple. The approach contends that each employee comes with a different background, set of skills, perspectives, motivation and commitment; and that each leader typically has a preferred approach and style. And, getting the best out of employees requires a leader to be able to diagnose where their employees are at and then match that with an appropriately supportive leadership approach.

Here are a just a few comments from people who attended the Situational Frontline Leadership Program course this FY:



“A very systematic approach and it empowers you to be more thoughtful with how you talk about tasks, handle problems and really be honest with employees.”

“I have already informed my direct reports that I will be using this when I assign tasks and talk about performance.”

““Training session was excellent and effective – relevant examples, good pace allowed us time for discussion.”

The training was offered in two formats, live and virtual. There were six 2 day training courses offered in multiple locations and three virtual cohorts. Each cohort met one day a week, for two hours for the duration of 6 weeks. A total of 150 supervisors and managers participated in this offering. Exploring both options allowed APHIS for greater outreach of services to help support the learning needs of our managers, while accommodating busy work schedules.

If you are interested in learning more about this Program or what is planned for FY 2012, please contact Kim Kanaga at 301-734-5600.

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We hope that the HR Broadcast is meeting your needs and communicating topics of interest, but if there are items you would like to see included in future issues, please contact our HR Broadcast editor, Christina Furnkranz, at [Christina.S.Furnkranz@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:Christina.S.Furnkranz@aphis.usda.gov)

August 2011 Issue

## Applying for Positions in the MRP Mission Area

Have you ever wondered how federal jobs get filled? How to apply for a promotion? What happens to job applications once submitted to HR? If you answered yes to any of these questions, the following article outlines the basic steps to de-mystify the hiring/application process and will provide you with a better understanding of the procedures used in Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP).



There are two types of announcements used to advertise vacant positions – Merit Promotion and Case Examining. At the very basic level, Merit Promotion announcements are open to current and former Federal employees with competitive status and Case Examining announcements are open to the general public. Both types of announcements allow you to apply using a cover letter and resume in a format of your choice. Gone are the days of completing a standardized application form or a prescribed format for a resume!

Prior to announcing the position, the Human Resources (HR) staff confers with the hiring manager on the method in which positions will be announced and the method used to evaluate the applications to yield the best qualified candidates for the position. Once your resume and cover letter are submitted via USAJOBS (reference the article titled: “How to Apply for Positions using USAJOBS”), one of three pre-determined hiring models will be used to evaluate your resume/application. The three hiring models are:

- Evaluation based on your responses to a job related questionnaire;
- Evaluation based on your responses to a job related questionnaire **and** a brief structured interview; or
- Evaluation against a crediting plan (pre-established benchmarks of job-related experience, training, etc., that – if possessed – would enhance a candidate’s performance in a position) based on the information provided in your resume.

After the announcement closes, HR reviews your application for eligibility. Under Merit Promotion this includes time-in-grade, competitive status, and special appointment eligibility in addition to the requirements that apply to both announcement methods, e.g., citizenship, submission of required documentation requested in the announcement, and minimum qualifications. Minimum qualifications reviews are an assessment of an applicant’s background, e.g., education, training, experience, against standards established by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) which applicants are required to meet in order to perform satisfactorily in a particular position. Next, minimally qualified applicants (except the non-competitive candidates) are evaluated based on the selected hiring model (see above) to determine the best qualified candidates.

If the position was announced using Merit Promotion procedures, the best qualified and non-competitive candidates are referred to the hiring manager on a certificate in alphabetical order; scores are not disclosed. Interviews are not required and in general, any applicant on the certificate may be selected.

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## Merit Systems Principles

The Merit System Principles are nine basic standards that govern the management of the executive branch workforce. The Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) provides an overview of one principle each month. For an interesting review of the intent, recent decisions, and guidance on these important principles, please go to the link: <http://www.mspb.gov/meritsystemsprinciples.htm>



*Applying for Positions in the MRP Mission Area continued from page 2*

Under Case Examining procedures, applications are handled differently than they are under Merit Promotion. The qualifications requirements are the same, but veterans are given preference. All qualified applicants are then placed in one of three categories- Best Qualified, Well Qualified, or Qualified- based on the score achieved through the selected hiring model.



Depending on the position being filled and the type of preference, veterans are either placed at the top of their quality category or at the top of the highest quality category. The hiring manager receives a certificate that lists the candidates who are in the Best Qualified (highest) quality category. They are in alphabetical order (no scores are listed) and veterans are listed ahead of non-veterans. Interviews are not required and any candidate may be selected, provided a veteran is not bypassed to select a non-veteran.

HR encourages you to review each announcement carefully to determine which jobs are available to you and the required documentation for the position to which you are applying. If this quick overview did not answer all of your questions, please contact your servicing Human Resources Staffing Specialist or Assistant and review the reference materials on the HRD website.

## Contacts:

APHIS: [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact\\_us/downloads/HRO\\_APHIS.pdf](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/HRO_APHIS.pdf)

AMS: [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact\\_us/downloads/HRO\\_AMS.pdf](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/HRO_AMS.pdf)

GIPSA: [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact\\_us/downloads/HRO\\_GIPSA.pdf](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/HRO_GIPSA.pdf)

## References:

MRP Veterans Hiring and Employment Website: <http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/veteran/index.shtml>

USAJOBS Individuals with Disabilities Website: <http://www.usajobs.gov/individualswithdisabilities.asp>

MRP Category Rating and Selection Policy: [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/library/directives/pdf/MRP\\_4030\\_1.pdf](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/library/directives/pdf/MRP_4030_1.pdf)

MRP Human Resources Desk Guide-Category Rating:  
[http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr\\_desk\\_guide/4030/index.shtml](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4030/index.shtml)



Technology At Work

Persons with disabilities who need program information in alternate formats (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY).



HOME

## How to Apply for Positions using USAJOBS

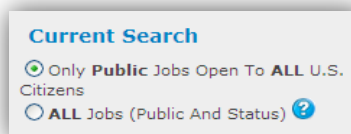
By Stephanie Nelson ([Stephanie.F.Nelson@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:Stephanie.F.Nelson@aphis.usda.gov), 612-336-3560)



The previous article “Applying for Positions in the MRP Mission Area” outlined basic steps to de-mystify the hiring/application process and provided a better understanding of the procedures used in Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) when applying for jobs. It referenced using USAJOBS to apply for positions – the following short tips will help you with navigating the mechanics of applying for positions using the USAJOBS website.

### Applying for Positions:

1. Create or login to your USAJOBS account: <http://www.usajobs.gov>
2. Upload your resume or build a resume using the USAJOBS Resume Builder.
3. Search for jobs. (When searching for positions on USAJOBS, the default setting only includes positions open to all U.S. citizens, to view positions open to current and former Federal employees (Merit Promotion), select “All Jobs (Public and Status).”  
For additional screen prints, please click: [Viewing Merit Promotion Vacancies](#)



4. Once a desired position has been identified, click [Apply Online] where you will be transferred to the USDA application system.
5. Continue through the on-screen prompts until you reach the [Finish] button.
6. You will then be transferred back to USAJOBS and your application status will read “Resume Received.”

### Checking the Status of Your Application:

1. Login to your USAJOBS account: <http://www.usajobs.gov>
2. Click [Application Status] and locate the position.
3. Refer to the Application Status column.

An abbreviated status will be available; however, by clicking on the “more information” link you will be transferred to the USDA application system where a detailed status will be available. Your status will generally be updated 2 weeks after the vacancy close date.

#### Additional Resources:

For detailed application instructions, view the MRP How to Apply Online brochure by clicking: [How to Apply Online](#)

USAJOBS also offers online guides and step-by-step assistance via the USAJOBS Info Center at: [www.usajobs.gov/infocenter](http://www.usajobs.gov/infocenter)

You may also contact the Agency Contact listed in the vacancy announcement or email: [apphelp@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:apphelp@aphis.usda.gov)

***Always read vacancy announcements carefully and provide the information requested.***



## Alternative Discipline Agreements

By David Spellman ([David.J.Spellman@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:David.J.Spellman@aphis.usda.gov), 202-720-3011)

Would you prefer tailor-made clothes or off-the-rack? What if the tailor-made clothing could be any color or design you wanted, considerably less expensive, and available much more quickly? What if a year from now, the tailor-made clothing needed adjustment and the future adjustments were included in the original price?

The above metaphor shows why Alternative Discipline Agreements (“ADAs”) may be a valuable tool for all involved. Alternative discipline allows agency management to tailor-make the disciplinary process in each case to meet the needs of the Agency, the employee(s), and the efficiency of the service.



The disciplinary process of 5 USC, Chapter 75 is inherently legalistic and restrictive. That’s expected in a statute which seeks to balance employees’ rights to property and due process with the Government’s (and taxpayers’) right to the efficiency of the service.

The purpose of the disciplinary process is to correct employee misconduct in order for the agency to focus on the mission of our agency. If traditional discipline is imposed, the available options are warnings, reprimands, suspensions, demotion or removal. These options might not best serve the efficiency of the service in any given circumstance and often give rise to protracted disputes and litigation.

On the other hand, often ADAs provide for a lesser, yet potentially more effective, corrective action than the formal Chapter 75 process. ADAs seek to have the employee: acknowledge his/her misconduct; provide assurance he/she will not repeat the misconduct; modify his/her behavior to avoid future discipline; waive his/her right to contest the discipline chosen in the ADA; agree on what discipline is appropriate should he/she engage in new misconduct; preserve or reestablish a positive working relationship between the supervisor and the employee; use the time of managers and employees more efficiently; and avoid or greatly reduce any grievances, complaints or litigation in the case.

When should you consider an ADA? Really, the answer is nearly always, but a non-exhaustive list of factors to consider are:

- When the employee admits his/her misconduct;
- When the employee is seen as having rehabilitation potential and/or apologizes for the behavior;
- When the employee is willing to waive his/her rights to contest the agreed upon discipline in exchange for the tailor-made discipline;
- When the employee and agency would benefit from agreeing to other conditions, such as a referral to the Employee Assistance Program (“EAP”), mandatory training, or paying a debt owed.
- When there may be mitigating circumstances surrounding the misconduct, such as job tensions, personality issues, mental or emotional impairment, or problems in the employee’s personal life.

*Continue to page 6*



## *Alternative Discipline Agreements continued from page 5*

What are some of the options in ADAs? The neat thing is they are almost as limitless as your good judgment in providing sound managerial advice. Some tailor-made ADA options include:

- ❖ Using the carrot-and-stick approach of suspending the employee for a lesser than usual number of days, while holding the remaining number of days in abeyance for a period of time (such as two or three years) so long as the employee does not engage in misconduct during the period;
- ❖ Using alternatives to suspension, such as “paper suspensions” which formally record a suspension in the eOPF (for purposes of progressive discipline) but which do not require the employee to be absent from work or forego the related pay; or, requiring the employee to donate an appropriate number of hours to the leave bank program; and
- ❖ Requiring the employee to engage in affirmative action to remedy the misconduct, such as: restitution when appropriate, specialized training, using EAP services, or donating leave.

What steps should you consider in crafting an ADA?

- ❖ First, either issue a Proposal to the employee (e.g., Notice of Proposed Suspension) so that the grounds for traditional discipline are made clear OR describe in detail in a proposed agreement the specific reasons why discipline is appropriate and what traditional discipline would be proposed in the absence of reaching an ADA;
- ❖ Fulfill contract law in the ADA – provide consideration for the agreement (usually an exchange of a lesser penalty for the waiver of rights);
- ❖ Use plain language;
- ❖ Act in good faith – as with all contracts, there is an implied covenant of good faith that applies to both parties;
- ❖ Comply with any applicable statutes, regulations, collective bargaining agreements, or any other contracts/agreements;
- ❖ Preferably, specify an admission of misconduct by the employee, and recite a summary of the facts to which he/she admits;
- ❖ Recite the penalty that would have been appropriate under the USDA guide for disciplinary penalties and some of the applicable factors relevant to penalty consideration (called the “Douglas Factors”) and, therefore, what would have been the appropriate proposed discipline absent the ADA;
- ❖ Specify the alternative discipline, the specific terms to be carried out, the applicable time-frame for any discipline held in abeyance, and the applicability of progressive discipline as a result of the ADA;
- ❖ Describe the mechanism for imposing discipline if the employee violates the ADA; and,
- ❖ Make employee waivers clear so they pass muster by the Merit Systems Protection Board (“MSPB”) or Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”) (e.g., do not waive future EEO rights and make sure to include the Older Workers Benefits Protection Act (“OWBPA”) waiver language for employees age 40 or older).



Additionally, other types of agreements can be considered in some situations, such as “Last Chance Agreements” in which removal is appropriate, but held in abeyance or “Resignation Agreements” in which a proposed removal or other action is resolved with a resignation or retirement.

This brief overview of tailoring discipline is far from comprehensive but is intended to give you some basic understanding of alternative discipline options.

If you are interested in learning more about ADA’s please contact our staff at: [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/hrd\\_collaborative\\_resolutions.shtml](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/hrd_collaborative_resolutions.shtml)

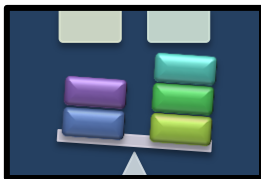




## From The Policy Branch

### Making Organizational Changes in Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP)

By Rick Traetow ([Rick.E.Traetow@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:Rick.E.Traetow@aphis.usda.gov),  
612-336-3440)



Recent and anticipated budget reductions have intensified efforts to achieve costs savings through sound workforce planning and position management. Some of these efforts can include increasing the supervisory span of control; adjusting or redirecting program operations and support services; eliminating duplicate functions; and controlling costs for personnel, space, equipment, and utilities. Many, if not all, of these efficiencies will result in structural changes to an organization.

As agencies work to realize increased savings and efficiencies, it is important to know that some of the organizational changes stemming from these efforts may need review and approval by either the Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP), or the USDA, Assistant Secretary for Administration (ASA). USDA Directive 1010-001, Organization, outlines the requirements for making various types of organizational change.

Generally speaking, Assistant Secretary for Administration approval is needed for changes that involve requesting additional budget authority or that involve reprogramming of appropriated funds. For example, requesting funding for a new lab facility or transferring a program between agencies would be circumstances where ASA approval is needed. Other organizational changes that require ASA approval include changes create a net increase in physical space, are management initiated reductions in staff, close an office or transfer an entire office across Congressional District lines, or transfer a function across mission areas. All other major organizational changes can be approved by the MRP Under Secretary. Establishing a new organizational component with new functions or transferring an organizational function within an agency are examples of change that will be reviewed by the Under Secretary.

Many organizational changes, however, do not need approval beyond the individual agency. These changes include consolidating existing organizational components for better supervisory ratios or because of reduced funding; closing temporary offices set up for emergency response; updating functional statements; or renaming organizational components are examples of change that do not require approval outside the immediate organization.

Human Resources has developed guidance on the 1010 process as part of a new chapter in its Human Resources Desk Guide. The chapter outlines roles and responsibilities and provides processing guidance and sample formats of reorganization documents required by the DR 1010. The Desk Guide can be accessed by clicking on the link below:

[http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr\\_desk\\_guide/1010/index.shtml](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/1010/index.shtml)

Questions on the process for organizational change can be referred to Rick Traetow of Human Resources at 612-336-3440.



## From The Policy Branch

### FY 2011 Performance Cycle Ends Soon

The FY2011 performance cycle ends on **September 30, 2011**. Managers and supervisors are required to conduct performance evaluations for all eligible employees. Performance appraisals must be completed within 30 days of the end of the cycle (**October 30**). Performance award recommendations must be completed, approved, and signed by **September 30, 2011** in order to use FY2011 funds. All signed performance appraisals (first page of AD-435) **must be submitted to HR Processing by November 15, 2011** and performance award recommendation forms (AD-287-2) must be submitted by **November 29, 2011**. If you have any questions, please contact Gwen Montgomery, at (301) 734-6341 or at [Gwen.Montgomery@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:Gwen.Montgomery@aphis.usda.gov).

**\*Note\* Changes in red were made on 9/7/11.**

### Changes to Student Performance Feedback Tool

By Gwen Montgomery

([Gwendolyn.W.Montgomery@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:Gwendolyn.W.Montgomery@aphis.usda.gov),  
301-734-6341)

In 2010, the USDA Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) introduced the Student Internship Program Performance Feedback Tool in support of the Secretary's goal to provide meaningful, positive work experiences to expose young people of various backgrounds and ethnicities to the work of USDA. The tool was initially developed to provide performance feedback to summer students who will be working less than 90 days and who do not fall within the regulatory requirement to have formal performance plans implemented.



In support of its' Cultural Transformation Initiative, USDA, in late FY2010, created a student internship program with the goal of ensuring cross-agency communications, excellent and diverse candidate pools, meaningful experiences for interns and employers, and accountability. As a part of this new program, the Student Internship Program Performance Feedback Tool was revised to incorporate new program requirements and its use expanded to include all student interns. The Feedback Tool allows supervisors to communicate expectations at the beginning of the student's period of employment; identify how the work of the program aligns with the goals of the Agency and the USDA mission; and provide feedback regarding the student's performance.

The Student Internship Program Performance Feedback Tool is available on the USDA Connect website at <http://connections.usda.gov>. Should you have any questions, related the tool, please contact Gwen Montgomery, [Gwen.Montgomery@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:Gwen.Montgomery@aphis.usda.gov). If you have questions related to the Student Internship Program, please contact Linda Blackmon, [Linda.Blackmon@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:Linda.Blackmon@aphis.usda.gov).





## Employee Separations – Ensuring Efficient Processing

By Faith Dietz ([Faith.K.Dietz@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:Faith.K.Dietz@aphis.usda.gov),  
612-336-3332)

### What are the most common types of separations?

**Termination Appointment In:** This is a separation action initiated by either the employee or the agency when the employee moves from one Federal agency to another Federal agency. **Note:** Annual and sick leave are transferred to the new agency, but Compensatory hours and Credit hours are paid to the employee.

**Termination Expiration of Appointment:** This is a separation action initiated by the agency to end employment on the not-to-exceed date of a temporary employee.

**Resignation:** This is a separation initiated by the employee to leave the Federal government. A resignation letter or email is required documentation to be included with the SF-52.

**Retirement:** This is a separation that entitles the employee to an immediate annuity. The employee should have already submitted retirement forms to the HRO Benefits Section.

### What paperwork is required to be submitted for separation actions?

1. **SF 52, Request for Personnel Action, through PATS** as soon as possible after the employee notifies you of the separation date. In all cases, include the employee's forwarding home address.



2. **AD-581, Payment of Lump Sum Leave, and AD-717, Leave Audit.** These documents should be submitted within one week of the employee's separation either by fax or email to your Processing Service Provider. These documents can be found at: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/forms/pay.shtml>. Except for transfers to a new agency, Annual, Compensatory, and Credit hours are paid to the employee.
3. **Performance Appraisals:** OPM regulations require that the last 4 years Performance ratings and most current Performance Plan for the latest appraisal be included in a separating employee's electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF). Forward these documents to your Processing Service Provider when you submit the SF-52. They can be emailed or faxed.

### What about someone leaving your agency, but staying with USDA?

The employee will move based on the SF-52 that the gaining USDA agency submits. Usually, there is no need for the losing agency to submit an SF-52.

### Questions ?

Please contact your Processing Service Provider at the following:

[http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact\\_us/downloads/processing\\_prog\\_assignments.pdf](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/processing_prog_assignments.pdf)

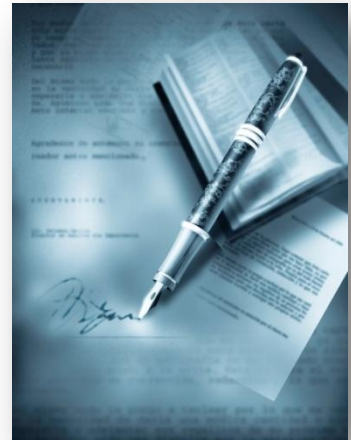




## How to Avoid Delayed Background Investigations

By Patricia Hample ([Patricia.J.Hample@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:Patricia.J.Hample@aphis.usda.gov), 612-336-3607)

How to avoid delayed background investigations and tips to assist you in the successful completion of OPM's electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP) form.



Reading the instructions is the primary tip; carefully following them will eliminate most errors.

- Provide complete addresses, including phone numbers.
- Do not name the same person twice anywhere in the document and do not name relatives unless the form specifically asks for this information.
- If you do not know your neighbors, you may list a co-worker or someone else who knows you lived at that specific address.
- Include the present employment with USDA in the employment section of the questionnaire. (The employment information on the e-QIP questionnaire form should match what was submitted in the employee's resume plus their current position with USDA.)
- If applicable, retrieve the Selective Service Registration number by going to [www.sss.gov](http://www.sss.gov)
- Print, complete, sign, date and send the requested documents as outlined in the instructions provided with the notice of investigation.

Please contact the Personnel Security staff if there are any questions.

[http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/personnel\\_security.shtml#contact](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/personnel_security.shtml#contact)



## BENEFITS BUZZ

### Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA)

The Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) offer began June 1 and runs through August 30, 2011. Employees who are eligible for and interested in this offer must retire no later than October 3, 2011. For more information, please see:

[http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/benefits/vera\\_vsip.shtml](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/benefits/vera_vsip.shtml)

